Raising the Tone?

Raising the tone? The impact of 'positive' and 'negative' campaigning on voting in the 2007 Scottish Parliament election

Charles Pattie (University of Sheffield), David Denver (Lancaster University), Robert Johns and James Mitchell (University of Strathclyde)

Abstract

Most research on campaign effects in British elections has focussed on exposure to the campaign. Far less attention has been given to how the campaign is perceived, although American research on the effects of negative campaigning suggests that this is a potentially important area. The article investigates the extent to which vote choices in the 2007 Scottish Parliament election were affected by perceptions of the parties' campaigns as 'positive' or 'negative'. Partisanship and increased exposure to a party's campaign increased individuals' chances of rating a campaign positively. Other things being equal, however, campaigns which come to be seen in a negative light backfire on the party responsible, reducing the propensity of people to vote for it.

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The importance of local campaigning in British elections is now well-established. In general, the more effort parties put into their constituency election campaigns the better they do (see, for example, Denver and Hands, 1997; Denver *et al*, 2004; Pattie *et al.*, 1995; Pattie and Johnston, 2003). There is still more to learn, however. One lacuna in the UK campaign effects literature to date has been its almost complete silence on the issue of campaign tone. In contrast, there is considerable debate in the North American literature (and more widely among political commentators) on whether and how 'negative', as opposed to 'positive', political advertising affects voters. Some argue that negative advertising has a demobilising effect, such that electors exposed to it become less likely to vote in future (Ansolabehere *et al.*, 1994; Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995). Others claim, on the contrary, that negative advertising either has no net effect on voters, or may actually encourage participation (Freedman and Goldstein, 1999; Goldstein and Freedman, 2002; Lau and Pomper, 2004; Sigelman and Kugler, 2003).

Much has been written on the content of political messages in the UK (see, for example, Scammell, 1995; Kavanagh, 1995; Rosenbaum, 1997; Norris *et al.*, 1999; van Heerde, 2007) but, apart from work by Sanders and Norris (2005), there has been no serious attempt to analyse the impact of the tone of campaign messages on British voters. It is unclear, therefore, whether American concerns about the impact of negative campaigning are transferable to other polities. In this article, we provide an analysis of campaign tone in the UK context by analysing data from a survey of voters at the 2007 Scottish Parliament election. As discussed below, the campaigns of the major parties were perceived as varying sharply in tone, providing us with favourable circumstances in which to analyse the relative effects of negative and positive campaigning in the UK.

Understanding campaign tone

Probably as a consequence of the fact that the United States has relatively open and unregulated environment for political advertising, most of the existing research on campaign tone has been on US elections. First amendment rights allow candidates to buy substantial amounts of (especially television) advertising and to use it to put forward whatever message

they wish. While many campaign messages are positive, publicising the candidate's own record and policy stances, there is a long-standing tradition of negative advertising, attacking opponents fairly or unfairly (Jamieson, 1992). Famous examples of the genre include Lyndon Johnson's 'daisy' advert from the 1964 Presidential campaign, which subliminally suggested that his Republican rival, Barry Goldwater, would provoke a nuclear war, and 1988's 'Willie Horton' and 'revolving door' adverts, which the Bush Sr. campaign used to suggest that Democrat candidate, Michael Dukakis, was soft on crime (and, some argue, to make coded reference to white American fears over race). In American elections, negative campaigning is more frequently indulged in by challengers than by incumbents, by Republicans than by Democrats, by those with limited campaign resources than by those with well-funded campaigns, by candidates in open seat contests and by those who are themselves the targets of negative campaigns (Lau and Pomper, 2001a, 2004). In other words, 'going negative' is a strategy of the political underdog (who may hope that a negative campaign will resonate more with voters – or just be noticed more by them - than a positive one) and of challengers (who are less likely to have a positive record in office to defend). Furthermore, the tendency for those attacked to go negative themselves reflects the widely held belief among political campaigners that the worst response to an attack is to fail to respond: as Lau and Pomper (2001a, 2004) put it, negative campaigning can result in a nuclear mutually assured destruction strategy.

Despite the long tradition of negative campaigning in US politics, it is only in the last decade or so that analysis of its impact has moved from the anecdotal to the evidential. What has since become a major research area was kick-started by some ingenious experimental research which randomly assigned participants to different treatment groups, some of which were shown negative campaign material, some positive, and some a mixture of both. Negative advertising seemed to demobilise participants: those exposed to such messages became more cynical about politics, felt less efficacious and became less inclined to vote than was the case for those seeing more positive messages (Ansolabehere *et al.*, 1994; Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995). Speaking as it did to anxieties about political participation, disengagement and growing distrust of politicians, this research caught a mood. Increasingly, however, the original 'demobilisation' argument has been challenged by subsequent research. It has been suggested that, far from putting people off politics, negative advertising can actually encourage participation by reminding voters why they want to ensure that a particular candidate or party is kept out of office (Freedman and Goldstein, 1999; Lau and

Pomper, 2001b; Goldstein and Freedman, 2002). Others have rejected claims that negative campaigning increases distrust of politicians and reduces people's sense of political efficacy. On the contrary, the public seem relatively robust in their ability to withstand and discount negative campaign messages (Brooks, 2006; Brooks and Geer, 2007; Jackson *et al*., 2009). Overall, Lau and Pomper's (2004) summary of the then-existing literature concluded that there was little real evidence for demobilization.

More detailed analyses suggest that the impact of exposure to negative campaigning varies according to the characteristics of individuals – especially their level of political involvement. Sigelman and Kugler (2003), for instance, find that partisanship strongly influences voters' perceptions of the same campaign as positive, negative or neutral, as does level of political knowledge (those with more knowledge being more likely to perceive campaigns as negative). Partisans as a whole are less likely than non-partisans to perceive campaigns as negative, in part reflecting the tendency of the former to be more attentive to messages from 'their' party or candidate than to those from rivals (Iyengar *et al*., 2008). In general, partisans tend to perceive attacks on their party by opponents as unfair and illegitimate but when such attacks hit home they seem to have an impact: partisans who see attacks on their party as fair are less likely to vote than are those who shrug them off (Stevens *et al*., 2008). Furthermore, negative campaigning is less likely to influence feelings of efficacy or attitudes towards parties among more politically sophisticated voters than among the less well-informed. (Stevens, 2008).

Although there are systematic variations in voters' perceptions both of the negativity and of the fairness of campaigns, such perceptions of campaign tone are not completely shaped by partisanship. Ridout and Franz (2008) compare voters' perceptions of campaign tone against different 'objective' measures of campaign negativity based on campaign broadcasts, media reports and so on. They find that, however campaign tone is measured, voters' perceptions of whether a campaign was negative or positive correlate well with 'expert' assessments. The public, in short, is generally good at picking up on the overall tone of a campaign. Partisanship and political knowledge may affect how they process and use those perceptions, but they do not seem to affect the perceptions themselves.

The key work on campaign tone in the UK is by Sanders and Norris (1998, 2005; Norris *et al*., 1999) who adapt the experimental approach of Ansolabehere and Iyengar. Overall, their results suggest that television campaign messages have little impact on British voters.

However, as they acknowledge, while the impact of a one-off exposure to a particular campaign message in the context of an experiment may be small, the cumulative impact of repeat messages in the context of an actual campaign might be larger.

Much of the research to date on this topic has focussed on the impact of negative political advertising on turnout and participation and thus sheds no light on other possible effects. Even if negative campaigning does not change decisions on whether or not to vote, it may still influence party choices. Negative campaigning (or the perception that a campaign is negative) may persuade people not to vote for the party being targeted but to opt for another party (the course of action hoped for by the party running the campaign). This has the potential to backfire, however. To the extent that negative campaigning is either adjudged unfair or seen as an indicator of an overly-aggressive approach to politics, it might also damage the standing of the campaigning party. Analyses of US Senate elections suggest that negative campaigns have few beneficial effects on party support. Challengers may receive a slight boost by going negative if they have few campaign resources but incumbents who go negative tend to lose votes (Lau and Pomper, 2002, 2004).

In the remainder of the article, we investigate the impact of campaign tone on vote choice in the context of the 2007 Scottish Parliament election. We begin, however, with a short discussion of the campaign context.

The Scottish Parliament Election 2007: the campaign context

Table 1 shows the results of the 2007 Scottish Parliament election[1] which produced Labour's worst performance in Scotland since 1955. Having dominated Scottish politics for half a century, Labour was narrowly beaten into second place by the SNP, which in turn obtained its best ever result (Denver, 2007; Johns *et al*., 2009a). Labour's defeat was widely anticipated. The Scottish party was adversely affected by the unpopularity of the UK Labour government but adverse public evaluations of the Labour-led Scottish Executive's performance in the preceding Parliament also did substantial damage (Johns *et al*., 2009a, 2009b). The SNP, meanwhile, having re-elected Alex Salmond as party leader in 2004, was riding high. From late 2006 through to March 2007 the SNP led Labour fairly consistently in voting intentions for Holyrood.

Table 1 about here

The very different pressures facing Labour and the SNP were reflected in the parties' campaigns (Jones, 2007; Johns *et al.*, 2009a). Labour's campaign played on fears that an SNP win would be the first step towards independence, with particular emphasis on the alleged adverse effects on Scotland's economy. The party's campaign was not all negative: for instance, Jack McConnell, Labour leader and First Minister in the outgoing administration, launched the party's manifesto with a major commitment to investment in education. Arguably, however, negative messages about the SNP outweighed the positive in Labour's campaign, at least in terms of the amount of coverage that they received.

The SNP, on the other hand, was able to campaign on the promise of a fresh start after the Labour years: 'time for a change' was undoubtedly part of its appeal. Ironically, as Jones (2007) points out, the message of change was accompanied by some of the tactics employed by New Labour in 1997, such as reaching out to traditionally hostile groups like business and middle-class voters. Strategically, the SNP approach was influenced by the work of political psychologist Martin Seligman (1998) who argued that elections tend to be won by parties projecting positive messages. The party tried to counter fears over imminent independence (which it was important to do as a majority of Scottish voters remains opposed to independence) by proposing a referendum prior to any action. Moreover, in order to project a more positive image Alex Salmond adopted a measured, statesman-like tone and played down his normally combative personality.

In this election, then, it was the incumbent party – Labour – which fought the more negative campaign and the challenger – the SNP – which accentuated the positive. This is the reverse of the normal pattern in the US and reflects Labour's perceived status as the underdog going into the election and the party's difficulties in making a positive case out of its record in office. In effect, important parts of the party's campaign boiled down to Hilaire Belloc's famous advice for middle-class Edwardian children: 'always keep a-hold of Nurse, for fear of finding something worse'.

Given their dominance of Scottish politics, the Labour and SNP campaigns inevitably received most media attention. The other two major parties, the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives (and, *a fortiori*, the minor parties in Scottish politics) struggled to make themselves heard. For the Liberal Democrats, the campaign challenge was to present

themselves as an effective party of government (as they had been a part of the ruling coalition since devolution and could point to some achievements in office) while at the same time keeping some distance from Labour, their unpopular partner in the Executive. Clearly, this was a difficult tightrope to walk. The Conservatives, meanwhile, had relatively little to lose (having been previously squeezed to the margins of Scottish politics) and much to gain. In a change from their strategy in previous Scottish elections, they downplayed talk of nationalist threats to the Union and focussed instead on the failings of the Scottish Executive, hoping to establish themselves as a more significant opposition force in the Scottish Parliament.

The 2007 Scottish election campaign thus provides a relatively clear case of a largely negative campaign run by Labour, a largely positive one run by the SNP and more mixed messages coming from the other parties. In the following sections, we look at how the campaigns were perceived and the influence of these perceptions on voting. First, however, we briefly describe our data.

Measuring campaign tone in Scotland 2007

The analyses reported here are based on data from an internet panel survey of Scottish voters conducted by YouGov on behalf of the Scottish Election Study (SES) 2007. We draw on the first two survey waves, the first of which took place about a fortnight before polling day on 3 May 2007 (1872 respondents) while the second was immediately after polling day (1552 respondents).[2]

For our purposes, the SES has clear advantages over face-to-face cross-sectional surveys. First, as with recent British Election Study surveys, the pre-post panel design is well-suited to the investigation of short-term campaign effects. Post-election cross-section surveys risk serious endogeneity problems in analysis, since explanatory variables are measured at the same time as dependent variables. If measured post-election, variables that could explain vote choice might themselves be affected by the result of the election, rendering their use as predictors of vote problematic. A pre-post panel, on the other hand, allows potential explanatory variables to be measured before the election, hence minimising endogeneity problems, and also permits a focus on change in vote across the course of a campaign.

Secondly, internet surveys have the considerable advantage of speed. Each wave of the SES took only a few days to complete. The views of respondents are unlikely, therefore, to have

been affected by events occurring between the start and the end of fieldwork. By contrast, large face-to-face surveys can be in the field for several weeks, increasing the risk that estimates of key variables may be affected by (for instance) changes in the post-election political landscape which have little or nothing to do with the election itself.[3]

In what follows we are primarily interested in responses to three sets of questions. The first relates to vote. In the pre-election wave, respondents were asked to indicate their voting intentions for both the regional and the constituency ballots; in the post-election wave, they were asked how they had actually voted in each ballot. Using these data, we can examine shifts in party supported across the campaign. The second set of questions, asked in the post-election wave, captures exposure to the parties' campaigns. Respondents were asked whether they had been canvassed, leafleted or telephoned during the campaign and by which party, and also which parties' televised party election broadcasts they had seen. The third set of questions asked second-wave respondents to assess how positive or negative, on the whole, they thought each party's campaign had been.[4]

Public perceptions of campaign tone

We consider first perceptions of campaign tone. Overall, public perceptions of which parties ran negative and which positive campaigns accord well with expectations (Table 2). The balance of opinion among respondents was that Labour's campaign was the most negative of all the major parties - almost 60 per cent of those expressing a view thought that the campaign was negative, a far larger proportion than for any other party's campaign. On the other hand, the SNP's decision to avoid negative campaigning appears to have been noticed by the public, 51 per cent of whom believed that the party's campaign had been positive. Although clear majorities viewed Labour's campaign as negative and the SNP's as positive, significant minorities had other views. Almost one in five respondents thought that the Labour campaign was positive, for instance, and a further one in five that it was balanced. Similarly, nearly a third of respondents saw the SNP's campaign as mainly negative. Clearly, perceptions of Labour and SNP campaign tone varied a good deal.

Table 2 about here

Opinions on the Liberal Democrat and Conservative campaigns were more mixed. The Conservative campaign elicited the most diverse opinions, with roughly a third of

respondents thinking it was positive, a third rating it as negative and a third seeing it in a broadly neutral light. The Liberal Democrat campaign evoked the most equivocal responses: more than 40 per cent of respondents rated it neither positive nor negative, considerably more than for any other party's campaign. It is difficult to know whether this means that people really thought that the Liberal Democrats' efforts were balanced or that they simply had no terribly strong impression of what the party's campaign was about. Most of those giving other responses on the Liberal Democrat campaign came down on the positive side.

We can measure the extent to which individuals' evaluations of the different parties' campaigns diverged or paralleled one another by correlating the ratings given to each party. As Table 3 shows, in most cases there is a modest correspondence of views. Thus, on average, the more negative someone thought the Labour campaign had been, the more negative he or she thought the Liberal Democrat campaign had been. Similar weakly positive relationships are found between assessments of the campaigns of the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and that of the SNP with both of the latter. On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between evaluations of the Conservative and Labour campaigns, while judgements regarding Labour's campaign were negatively related to perceptions of the SNP campaign. Overall, those who believed that Labour fought a negative battle saw the SNP campaign as positive, and *vice-versa*.

Table 3 about here

To explore the factors that underlie the various responses to the parties' campaigns, we employ regression models with evaluations of campaign tone as the dependent variables. Predictor variables include a range of demographic and political factors. We might expect education levels to have some bearing on evaluations in that those with more formal educational qualifications may be more judgemental than those with fewer qualifications. Age may also play a part, although it is difficult to predict whether older voters will be more or less cynical than their younger counterparts. In addition, we control for respondents' social class.

Turning to the political variables, previous research and common sense suggest that how voters assess a party's campaign will depend to some extent on whether or not they already support it and so we include party identification, as declared in the pre-election wave of the

survey. Since some research suggest that perceptions of campaign negativity increase with political knowledge (Sigelman and Kugler , 2003) we also include a measure of the latter - the number of correct responses (out of four) given to a short political quiz administered in the pre-election survey wave.[5] In addition, we might expect that individuals' perceptions of whether a party's campaign was positive or negative would be influenced by how heavily they had been exposed to the campaign. On the basis of the questions previously discussed we constructed a rough and ready index of exposure to each party's campaign by summing the number of different types of exposure reported. Finally, we include a variable measuring how likeable respondents thought each party was before the election took place. Respondents were asked to indicate this using an 11-point scale with low scores indicating strong dislike and high a strong liking. The variable is used here to capture general feelings towards each party over and above those associated with partisanship, in the expectation that the more favourably people feel towards a party in the opening stages of a campaign, the more likely they will be after the election to believe that the party campaigned positively.

The full details of the analyses are given in the appendix (Table A1) but Table 4 shows which variables made a significant impact on perceptions of campaign tone. In this table, 'P' and 'N' indicate that the variable had a significant impact on respondents' seeing a campaign more positively or more negatively, other things being equal, than the comparator group.

Table 4 about here

It is striking that, apart from perceptions of Labour's campaign, socio-demographic variables had very little impact. Older respondents were more likely to think the Conservative campaign was negative but otherwise education, age and class did not affect perceptions of the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and SNP campaigns. In Labour's case, those with qualifications had a more negative view than those without, all age groups tended to have a more positive perception than the youngest and the petty bourgeoisie and foremen had (even) more negative impressions than the salariat.

The political variables, on the other hand, had more impact on perceptions of campaign tone. In line with previous research, those with greater political knowledge tended to view the Labour campaign as being more negative but they were significantly less likely to think that the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats ran negative campaigns. Arguably, it is the actual

content of campaigns which determines whether the knowledgeable view them as positive or negative. The good news – for most parties – is that the more respondents remembered encountering their campaigns, the more positive they thought the campaigns were. This good news does not extend to Labour, however, since exposure to the Labour campaign had no impact on judgments regarding how positive or negative it was.

Unsurprisingly, the party likeability measures have a strong and consistent effect on campaign evaluations. The more individuals liked a party at the outset of the election, other things being equal, the more likely they were to say, after the election, that the party had fought a positive campaign. Liking or disliking parties is closely related to party identification but it is possible to feel warmly disposed to a party without being a partisan. Even taking party likeability into account, however, party identification continues to have some impact. Labour identifiers had a negative view of the Conservative campaign as did SNP supporters of the Labour campaign. SNP and Liberal Democrat identifiers thought their own parties' campaigns were positive and the latter took the same view of the SNP campaign. The only oddity in the party identification results is that, having taken account of the other variables, Conservatives tended to think that Labour's campaign was positive. This may reflect the fact that both parties shared hostility towards the SNP and its policy of Scottish independence on their part.

The impact of campaign tone

In this section, we examine whether assessments of campaign tone appear to affect party choice. We begin by looking once again at how much people liked the various parties. As the same question was also asked in the post-election wave of the SES, we can investigate whether people came to like a party less (or more) over the course of the election if they thought it had fought a negative (or positive) campaign.

Table 5 presents the results of four regression analyses predicting each party's post-election likeability score. In each equation we control for the relevant pre-election likeability score and, entirely as expected, all these coefficients are positive and significant. In other words, the more someone liked a party before the election, the more they liked it after.

Table 5 about here

Our main interest, however, is in the measures of perceived campaign tone. Campaign perceptions for all four parties are included in each equation. This enables us to ascertain not only whether those who believed that a party ran a positive campaign might feel better disposed towards it after the election than before, but also to assess whether negative campaigns by rival parties might also have an impact on likeability. Negative campaigns may damage the party that they are aimed at or else backfire, leading to sympathy for the target and calumny for the perpetrator.

The results support the latter conjecture. In each equation, the coefficient for the relevant party's campaign tone is significant and negative. This means that the more negative a party's campaign was perceived to be, the less likeable the party became over the course of the election. Other parties' campaigns also had some effect, however. Campaigns perceived to be negative can damage the campaigning party by making rival parties more likeable. The more negative people thought the Labour and SNP campaigns to have been, for instance, the more they came to like the Conservatives. Similarly, the more negative people thought the Conservatives had been the more their opinion of the other parties improved during the campaign. Those who thought that Labour had campaigned negatively came to like the SNP more and those who thought the SNP had been negative ended up more favourably disposed towards the Liberal Democrats. Overall, negative campaigns appear to have won few friends.

Turning to vote choices, we have seen that partisanship is an important correlate of attitudes towards campaigns: people think better of campaigns fought by parties they generally support than of the campaigns of other parties. It may be, therefore, that any apparent impact of campaign tone on vote choice simply reflects underlying partisanship. To test whether perceptions of campaign tone have an independent effect on vote choice, therefore, we need to control for pre-existing partisanship and we do so in a series of binary logistic regression models. Each contrasts those who cast their regional vote for a party (coded 1) with those who did not (either voting for another party or abstaining, coded 0). Pre-election party identification is the main control variable but we also control for exposure to each party's campaign. As before, full details are in the Appendix (Table A2) and we provide here a summary of the effects of significant variables (Table 6).

Table 6 about here

As is standard in analyses of party choice, those who identified with a party were more likely to vote for it and those who identified with another party or none were generally less likely to do so. In addition, other things being equal, greater exposure to the Conservative and SNP campaigns is associated with an increased likelihood of voting for these parties while the more people saw of the SNP campaign, the less likely they were to vote Labour. Intriguingly, however, neither the Labour nor the Liberal Democrat campaign seems to have gained further support, although the more someone saw of the Liberal Democrat campaign, the more likely he or she was to vote Labour. Our main interest here, however, is in perceptions of campaign tone and the regression results suggest that perceptions of how a party campaigned can influence vote choice, even controlling for prior party leanings. In every case, the more positive people felt a campaign to have been, the more likely they were to vote for the party; the more negative they rated it, the less likely they were to support the party. Furthermore, there is some evidence that perceptions of negative campaigning by one party are associated with a higher chance of voting for another. The more negative people felt the Conservatives' campaign to have been, the more likely they were to vote Liberal Democrat; the more negative the perception of the Labour or Liberal Democrat's campaigns, the greater the chance of voting SNP; and the more negative the SNP campaign was rated, the greater was the probability of voting for each of the other three major parties.

Our analyses suggest, therefore, that perceptions of campaign tone influence party choice in elections independently of partisanship. An alternative approach in assessing the impact of campaign perceptions is to control for initial voting intention rather than partisanship. Non-partisans might nonetheless have had a firm voting intention at the start of the campaign and that might have altered (as, indeed, might the vote of partisans) as a result of their reactions to the campaigns of the various parties. We repeat the analyses summarised in Table 6, therefore, but substituting pre-election vote intention for party identification. Results are reported as before (Table 7 and Table A3). By controlling for pre-campaign vote intention we are in effecting measuring the impact of perceptions of campaign tone in changing people's minds about which party to vote for.

Table 7 about here

There is, of course, considerable inertia in vote choice over the course of the campaign. Most of those intending voting for a party at the start of the campaign go on to do so on election

day and this is indicated in each equation by a large positive and significant coefficient for pre-election intention of voting for the relevant party.

The coefficients for campaign exposure need not detain us since, as before, our main interest is in the campaign tone variables. These are similar in direction and significance to those found when partisanship was controlled and demonstrate, once again, that negative campaigns win few friends while positive campaigns seem to gain support. Other things being equal, the more negative a party's campaign was perceived to have been, the less likely were respondents to switch to that party. Furthermore, there is evidence of negative campaigning driving voters to other parties. The more negatively people thought the Conservatives had campaigned, the more likely they were to switch to Labour or the Liberal Democrats. Similarly, perceptions of negative Labour campaigning were associated with a greater likelihood of switching to the SNP, negative Liberal Democrat campaigning also increased the chance of switching SNP and negative SNP campaigning increased the chances that voters would switch to the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats.

We noted above (Table 5) that the perceived tone of the parties' campaigns affected their general likeability and this might explain the impact on vote choice. The final step in our analysis, therefore, is to incorporate measures of party likeability into regressions predicting vote choice. This is done in Table 8 (full details in the appendix, Table A4) in which pre-election party likeability scores and change in likeability over the course of the election are added to the analysis reported in Table 7.

Table 8 about here

In every case, as we might expect, the more a party was liked before the election and the greater the increase in its likeability over the course of the campaign, the more likely respondents were to vote for it, after taking account of original voting intention. Adding the likeability measures has a striking effect on the coefficients for campaign tone, however. Only in the case of the SNP does evaluation of a party's campaign tone now significantly affect voting for it and, even in that case, the size of the coefficient (Table A4) is much smaller than in the previous analysis (Table A3). This strongly suggests that negatively perceived campaigning damages parties by making them less likeable in the voter's eyes. Parties which 'went negative' lost support by giving voters further reasons to dislike them. It

is also worth noting, however, that even when we control for party likeability, perceptions of how one party campaigned can still have an impact on the likelihood of voting for other parties. Other things being equal, those who thought Labour campaigned positively became less likely to vote SNP, and the more negative people thought the SNP's campaign, the more likely they were to vote Conservative or Labour.

Conclusion

Election campaigns inevitably combine both negative and positive elements. From a normative perspective, this is not necessarily a problem (Lau and Pomper, 2004). Negative campaigning can involve dirty tricks, unfair claims and character assassination but it can also point up real failings and weaknesses. Drawing attention to these is a legitimate function of democratic debate. Similarly, while positive campaigning may draw attention to future plans or past achievements it can also be less than helpful, as when a candidates or parties make claims of doubtful validity. Without positive campaign messages, voters may not know what they are voting for. Without negative messages, they may not always see rival claims thoroughly tested.

Here, however, we have not been concerned with normative aspects but with an empirical question – whether negative campaigning 'works' in the sense of motivating a party's supporters and putting people off rival parties. Presumably parties believe that this does happen or they would not 'go negative'. Campaign advisers argue that although voters may – and routinely do – say that they dislike the negative, 'yah-boo' aspects of politics, they nonetheless respond to negative messages. The evidence presented here, however, suggests that in the UK context this initially plausible argument is mistaken. The more negative a party's campaign is perceived to have been, the less likely people are to vote for the party, the more likely those who initially intended voting for it are to abandon it on polling day, and the more likely people are to move to its rivals. They do so because emphasising the negative makes parties less likeable. Negative campaigning, in short, produces negative results.

Notes

1 In elections for the Scottish Parliament a mixed member proportional system (MMP) – also known as the additional members system (AMS) – is used. Members are elected via one of two different routes: 73 via plurality constituency contests, and 56 via regional list contests in eight regions

2 All analyses employ weights to take into account survey bias. The weights, designed by YouGov, are based on age, gender, social class, region, newspaper readership and past vote.

3 Just such a problem occurred during fieldwork for the 1992 British Election Study, for instance. Interviewing began immediately after John Major's Conservatives were re-elected but was still continuing several months later, after the ERM crisis had abruptly and irreversibly destroyed the new government's public support

4 The exact question wording was as follows: 'Campaigning is said to be positive when it involves putting forward your own policies and personalities. Negative campaigning means criticising the policies and personalities of the other parties. How would you rate the campaigns of the following parties (Conservatives; Labour; Liberal Democrats; SNP) on a scale from very positive to very negative?' The options given were: very positive; fairly positive; neither positive nor negative; fairly negative; very negative. In all following analyses, higher scores on the campaign tone variables indicate more negative evaluations of parties' campaigns.

5 The quiz consisted of four statements, which respondents were invited to judge true or false: "the SNP has promised to hold a referendum on independence if it wins" (true); "spending on the NHS in Scotland has gone down since 2003" (false); "after the election the new Scottish Executive will have to decide whether to renew the Trident nuclear weapon system" (false); and "the Scottish Liberal Democrats are committed to replacing the council tax with a local income tax" (true). A quarter of all respondents answered all four questions correctly; 29 per cent gave three correct answers; 27 per cent answered two correctly; 9 per cent got just one right; and 9 per cent got all four wrong.

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Table 1: The results of the 2007 Scottish Parliament election

	Constituencies		Regional list		Total Seats	
	Votes %	Seats	Votes %	Seats	N	%
Conservative	16.6	4	13.9	13	17	13.2
Labour	32.2	37	29.2	9	46	35.7
Lib Dem	16.2	11	11.3	5	16	12.4
SNP	32.9	21	31.0	26	47	36.4
Other	2.1	0	14.6	3	3	2.3

Table 2: Perceptions of campaign tone at the 2007 Scottish Parliament election

	Conservative %	Labour %	Lib Dem %	SNP %
Very positive	6	3	5	22
Fairly positive	30	17	30	29
Neither positive nor negative	30	21	41	20
Fairly negative	23	25	18	15
Very negative	11	34	7	14
(N)	(1214)	(1271)	(1216)	(1261)

Table 3: Correlations between assessments of campaign tone

	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem
Labour	-0.018	-	
Lib Dem	**0.234**	**0.285**	-
SNP	**0.159**	**-0.151**	**0.219**

Note: The number of cases involved ranges from 1189 (Con-Lib Dem) to 1214 (Lib Dem – SNP). Coefficients in bold are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

Table 4: Accounting for assessments of campaign tone: OLS regressions

Campaign tone:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Highest education qualification (comparison = none)				
Degree	-	**N**	-	-
Vocational	-	**N**	-	-
School	-	**N**	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-
Age group (comparison = 18-24)				
25-34	-	**P**	-	-
34-44	-	**P**	-	-
45-54	**N**	**P**	-	-
55-64	**N**	**P**	-	-
65+	-	**P**	-	-
Class (comparison = salariat)				
Non-manual	-	-	-	-
Petty bourgeoisie	-	**N**	-	-
Foremen	-	**N**	-	-
Working class	-	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-
Party identification (comparison = none)				
Conservative	-	**P**	-	-
Labour	**N**	-	-	-
Lib Dem	-	-	**P**	**P**
SNP	-	**N**	-	**P**
Other	-	-	-	-
Political knowledge	**P**	**N**	**P**	-
Exposure to party campaign	**P**	-	**P**	**P**
Pre-election party likeability	**P**	**P**	**P**	**P**

Table 5: The impact of perceived campaign tone on liking/disliking parties: OLS regressions

	Post-election like/dislike score			
	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Pre-election like/dislike score:	**0.75**	**0.78**	**0.62**	**0.69**
Campaign negativity score				
Conservative	**-0.52**	**0.12**	**0.21**	**0.25**
Labour	**0.12**	**-0.28**	0.05	**0.15**
Lib Dem	-0.04	-0.07	**-0.54**	0.08
SNP	**0.14**	0.04	**0.16**	**-0.70**
Constant	2.23	2.19	2.71	2.27
R^2	0.77	0.78	0.61	0.79
N	1147	1152	1147	1147

Note: coefficients in bold are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). For the campaign tone measures a positive coefficient implies a more negative evaluation of the campaign and *vice versa*.

Table 6: Campaign tone and regional vote choice, 2007: Binary logit regression

Regional vote:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Party identification (comparison = none)				
Conservative	**P**	**N**	-	**N**
Labour	-	**P**	**N**	**N**
Lib Dem	-	**N**	**P**	-
SNP	**N**	**N**	**N**	**P**
Other	-	-	-	**N**
Exposure to party campaigns				
Conservative	**P**	-	-	-
Labour	-	-	-	-
Lib Dem	-	**P**	-	-
SNP	-	**N**	-	**P**
Campaign tone				
Conservative	**P**	-	**N**	-
Labour	-	**P**	-	**N**
Lib Dem	-	-	**P**	**N**
SNP	**N**	**N**	**N**	**P**

Table 7: Campaign tone and changing regional vote choice, 2007: Binary logit regression

Regional vote:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Pre-election regional vote intention (comparison = abstain/other party/not sure)				
Conservative	**P**	**N**	**N**	-
Labour	**N**	**P**	**N**	**N**
Lib Dem	-	-	**P**	-
SNP	**N**	**N**	**N**	**P**
Exposure to party campaigns				
Conservative	-	-	-	-
Labour	-	**P**	-	-
Lib Dem	-	**P**	-	-
SNP	-	-	**N**	-
Campaign tone				
Conservative	**P**	**N**	**N**	-
Labour	-	**P**	-	**N**
Lib Dem	-	-	**P**	**N**
SNP	**N**	**N**	**N**	**P**

Table 8: Likeability, campaign tone and the regional vote, 2007: Binary logit regression

Regional vote:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Pre-election regional vote intention (comparison = abstain/other party/not sure)				
Conservative	**P**	-	-	-
Labour	**N**	**P**	**N**	-
Lib Dem	-	-	**P**	-
SNP	**N**	**N**	**N**	**P**
Exposure to party campaigns				
Conservative	-	-	-	-
Labour	-	-	-	-
Lib Dem	-	**P**	-	-
SNP	-	-	-	-
Campaign tone				
Conservative	-	-	-	**P**
Labour	-	-	-	**N**
Lib Dem	-	-	-	**N**
SNP	**N**	**N**	-	**P**
Pre-election party likeability scores	**P**	**P**	**P**	**P**
Change in party likeability scores	**P**	**P**	**P**	**P**

Appendix:

Table A1: Accounting for assessments of campaign tone: OLS regressions

Campaign tone:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Highest education qualification (comparison = no formal qualifications)				
Degree	--0.12	**0.23**	-0.02	-0.09
Vocational	-0.08	**0.24**	-0.01	-0.14
School	0.01	**0.24**	0.04	-0.02
Other	0.30	0.21	0.12	-0.14
Age group (comparison = 18-24)				
25-34	0.15	**-0.28**	-0.04	-0.11
34-44	0.10	**-0.36**	0.04	-0.03
45-54	**0.25**	**-0.35**	0.11	0.06
55-64	**0.31**	**-0.24**	0.16	0.12
65+	0.08	**-0.38**	0.04	0.01
Class (comparison = salariat)				
Non-manual	-0.02	-0.04	-0.14	0.01
Petty bourgeoisie	0.05	**0.33**	0.04	-0.08
Foremen	-0.02	**0.39**	0.17	0.03
Working class	0.09	0.05	0.06	-0.15
Other	-0.05	-0.16	-0.15	-0.15
Party identification (comparison = no party ID)				
Conservative	-0.21	**-0.22**	-0.14	-0.19
Labour	**0.19**	-0.12	-0.09	0.01
Lib Dem	0.09	-0.01	**-0.24**	**-0.33**
SNP	-0.09	**0.26**	-0.11	**-0.28**
Other	0.14	0.17	-0.17	0.01
Political knowledge	**-0.12**	**0.17**	**-0.05**	-0.05
Exposure to party campaign	**-0.17**	-0.04	**-0.09**	**-0.16**
Pre-election party likeability	**-0.14**	**-0.16**	**-0.15**	**-0.21**
Constant	3.93	4.22	4.07	4.51
R^2	0.26	0.30	0.22	0.39
N	1186	1243	1187	1223

Note: coefficients in bold are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). In all cases, a positive coefficient implies a more negative evaluation of the campaign and *vice versa*.

Table A2: Campaign tone and regional vote choice, 2007: Binary logit regression

Regional vote:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Party identification (comparison = none)				
Conservative	**2.17**	**-1.22**	-1.00	**-1.10**
Labour	-0.77	**1.95**	**-1.12**	**-1.24**
Lib Dem	-0.58	**-2.45**	**1.95**	-0.48
SNP	**-2.03**	**-1.52**	**-2.26**	**1.71**
Other	-0.37	-0.52	-19.33	**-1.11**
Exposure to party campaigns				
Conservative	**0.49**	-0.33	-0.35	0.11
Labour	-0.16	0.18	0.21	-0.06
Lib Dem	-0.15	**0.90**	0.00	-0.07
SNP	-0.23	**-0.39**	-0.17	**0.35**
Campaign tone				
Conservative	**-0.73**	0.13	**0.43**	0.05
Labour	0.06	**-0.49**	-0.08	**0.26**
Lib Dem	0.25	0.02	**-0.89**	**0.27**
SNP	**0.32**	**0.43**	**0.30**	**-0.92**
Constant	-2.58	-3.10	-4.97	-1.45
-2 log likelihood	772.46	1110.96	755.21	1441.85
Model improvement	313.44	433.46	266.85	633.31
Significance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Nagelkerke R^2	0.49	0.51	0.43	0.59
% correctly classified	91.6	86.4	91.8	0.85
N	1169	1169	1169	1168

Note: coefficients in bold are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). For the campaign tone measures a positive coefficient implies a more negative evaluation of the campaign and *vice versa*.

Table A3: Campaign tone and changing regional vote choice, 2007: Binary logit regression

Regional vote:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Pre-election regional vote intention (comparison = abstain/other party/not sure)				
Conservative	**2.58**	**-2.67**	**-1.81**	-0.57
Labour	**-3.59**	**2.39**	**-1.08**	**-1.33**
Lib Dem	-2.72	-0.82	**2.63**	-0.55
SNP	**-2.96**	**-2.34**	**-2.38**	**2.57**
Exposure to party campaigns				
Conservative	0.38	-0.24	-0.09	-0.12
Labour	-0.21	**0.34**	-0.02	0.01
Lib Dem	-0.18	**0.57**	0.10	0.23
SNP	-0.11	-0.18	**-0.46**	0.21
Campaign tone				
Conservative	**-0.78**	**0.24**	**0.29**	0.01
Labour	0.08	**-0.46**	-0.07	**0.27**
Lib Dem	0.08	0.17	**-0.81**	**0.26**
SNP	**0.39**	**0.30**	**0.27**	**-0.91**
Constant	-2.99	-3.81	-1.47	-1.44
-2 log likelihood	772.78	1111.55	755.51	1445.31
Model improvement	360.71	459.89	271.41	686.07
Significance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Nagelkerke R^2	0.55	0.53	0.44	0.63
% correctly classified	93.2	88.3	92.8	87.3
N	1170	1169	1169	1170

Note: coefficients in bold are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). For the campaign tone measures a positive coefficient implies a more negative evaluation of the campaign and *vice versa*.

Table A4: Likeability, campaign tone and the regional vote, 2007: Binary logit regression

Regional vote:	Conservative	Labour	Lib Dem	SNP
Pre-election regional vote intention (comparison = abstain/other party/not sure)				
Conservative	**1.58**	-2.01	-1.37	-0.03
Labour	**-3.05**	**1.45**	**-1.26**	0.76
Lib Dem	-2.49	-0.65	**1.85**	0.06
SNP	**-2.72**	**-1.96**	**-2.06**	**1.77**
Exposure to party campaigns				
Conservative	0.32	-0.13	-0.13	0.03
Labour	0.00	0.18	0.01	0.07
Lib Dem	-0.38	**0.67**	-0.10	0.27
SNP	--0.20	0.29	-0.34	-0.08
Campaign tone				
Conservative	-0.28	0.07	0.10	**-0.24**
Labour	-0.04	-0.13	-0.14	**0.25**
Lib Dem	0.07	0.22	-0.18	**0.23**
SNP	**0.27**	**0.37**	0.18	**-0.34**
Pre-election party likeability scores	**0.46**	**0.49**	**0.71**	**0.51**
Change in party likeability scores	**0.36**	**0.37**	**0.59**	**0.45**
Constant	-6.22	-7.87	-7.08	-5.69
-2 log likelihood	764.89	1085.34	745.31	1401.51
Model improvement	409.74	539.03	343.15	788.10
Significance	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Nagelkerke R^2	0.62	0.61	0.54	0.71
% correctly classified	93.1	88.9	93.2	88.6
N	1135	1138	1134	1133

Note: coefficients in bold are statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). For the campaign tone measures a positive coefficient implies a more negative evaluation of the campaign and *vice versa*.